The Doom of Principal City

YEFIM ZOZULYA

Translated by Vlad Zhenevsky

Yefim Davidovich Zozulya (1891–1941) was a Soviet-era writer and editor noted for his satirical stories about the Soviet state. Born in Moscow, Zozulya spent part of his childhood in the manufacturing town of Łódź in Poland before going to school in Odessa, now part of the country of Ukraine. Both Łódź and Odessa were part of the Russian Empire when Zozulya lived there.

In 1914 Zozulya started writing short stories and moved to St. Petersburg (Petrograd) to pursue a full-time literary career as an author and editor, his genre of choice being satire. His first collection, *The Doom of Principal City*, was published in 1918. A resident of Moscow from 1919 till his final years, Zozulya took active part in the literary life of the era, encouraging younger authors and founding an influential literary magazine among other things.

His contemporaries describe him as writing "easily and quickly." He considered literature a kind of fanciful sermon and preferred forms like the short stories, which he described as "shorter than a sparrow's beak." His work is rich with vivid worldly morals as well as symbolical and philosophical-satirical fables/tales, reminiscent of the *contes philosophiques*, which represented pressing social issues through allegorical images and situations. Later in his career Zozulya shifted to realism but the background of his stories still tended to be largely conventional, with few specific details about time and place. It may go without saying that Soviet realism-oriented critics did not approve of this approach and more than once Zozulya was jailed for engaging in revolutionary activities.

In the 1930s Zozulya tried his hand at larger forms, creating perhaps his most remarkable work, the novel *The Workshop of Men* (like the biblical "Fisher of Men"), which was published only partially and remained unfinished. As the Great Patriotic War broke out in 1941, he joined the editorial staff of a war newspaper after serving two months in the artillery troops but died from a severe illness at a military hospital on November 3. Despite his prominent position in the literary landscape of the prewar era, Zozulya's name is virtually unknown among present-day readers; most of his work was never republished.

Zozulya wrote several stories with a science-fictional quality. In "Story of Ak and Humanity," citizens vote to bestow total authority on their government, essentially making it totalitarian, and the government reciprocates with a demand that all citizens prove their right to exist, indicating that failure to comply will result in "departure from life" within twenty-four hours. His tale "Moscow of the Future" featured a community of fifty thousand writers, all in their twenties, with no children, with the implication that the children have been taken away to healthier, less subversive zones.

"The Doom of Principal City" may be one of the earliest depictions of dystopia in Russian (and perhaps world) history and represents his debut within these pages in the English language. The story also seems to contain an awareness of Andrei Bely's *Petersburg*, an experimental, fragmented novel, much lauded by Vladimir Nabokov, that tells the story of a man ordered to set off a time bomb in the titular city in the run-up to the 1905 revolution. In "Doom . . . ," the surreal elements of the satire make the story timeless—well positioned to predict the absurdities and counterlogic of Soviet life to come.

THE DOOM OF PRINCIPAL CITY

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1

Crowds assembled on the squares and crossroads that morning, sparse and inert. Unwashed, sleepy, disheveled, hastily dressed people rushed out of their houses to wander in uneasiness about the streets and greet one another with dejected sighing exclamations:

"They've come!"

"Yes. They're here."

Someone was reporting with his eyes closed, his arms pressed to the chest, "They're here. I live on the outskirts, so I heard the sound of trumpets. They were celebrating. The music played all night long."

"What about our army? Where's our army?"

"They're unable to put up a fight. According to the Chief General's strategic plan that was published yesterday, we are weakened by two and six-tenths. It would've been madness to struggle. Soldiers locked themselves in the barracks. They say they've been betrayed."

"Disgrace! What a disgrace!"

"Doom!"

"Music played all night long!"

"They'll enter the city tonight."

"Look! Look!"

One of the citizens, plain and seemingly sick, squatted and raised both his arms, his frightened and confused look fixed on the sky.

An airplane was circling high above Principal City.

A small dark clump came off it every few minutes and fell to the ground in a slanting irregular line.

"Run for your life!" Shouts were coming from every quarter. "Run for your life!"

Bending over, clutching their heads, dejected figures were running down the streets and hiding in the houses.

Yet they came out soon enough.

It emerged that the victorious enemy were throwing flowers off airplanes. . . . Decidedly real, enormous bouquets of carnations and roses . . .

"Oh, those vile, cruel people!"

"Bandits!"

"Mean, filthy souls!"

Each citizen of Principal City, however peaceful, was scolding the conquerors in a most acrimonious way. Flowers—instead of yesterday's bombs. Flowers tossed to those defeated, humiliated, and trampled on—that was wicked, infinitely hurtful mockery.

No one took those flowers. Two teenagers who picked them up out of curiosity were beaten up by a crowd and dumped off a bridge into the river.

Principal City acknowledged its disgrace at last.

Shops were closed. The tram was shut down.

And meanwhile in various parts of the city, upon streets, balconies, squares, and roofs, the others' flowers lay about, an offensive patchwork of the others' taunting joy, prompting sighs of grievance and despair from residents of Principal City.

2

Enemy troops were expected to enter the city triumphantly and march along the main streets,

invoking ultimate desperation in the hearts of everyone.

However, not a single detachment ever appeared. The foe made camp far outside the city, and it was only in some remote outskirts that music was heard, a great number of—more than fifty, as it came to be known later—combined orchestras playing at once.

In the night fiery writings from the enemy's word floodlights glowed above Principal City. Against the dark backdrop of the night sky, fiery verses by enemy poets were revealed. They told of the conquerors' might, of their civility and mercifulness. The verses were followed by blazing statements that the residents of Principal City would not be wronged, that their style of life would not be disturbed, and there was only one condition that the President would have to agree to. *One condition* was underlined.

After that, advertisements for enemy commercial firms were printed on the sky, praising soap, cocoa, watches, and shoes. The sky was entirely covered by these advertisements till dawn. Citizens wept in their houses. Coming up to the windows, they looked at the sky, read advertisements for bentwood furniture or hygienic mustache protectors, and—wept.

The next day was a quiet one. Music outside the city ceased. There were no more falling flowers. It was only in the night that multicolored advertisements—endless, endless—gleamed up in the sky again, so annoyingly, so brazenly, now representing smaller, marginal companies.

3

The President of Principal City summoned the most active Members of Parliament, representatives of the press, and the Chief General to tell them Principal City was perishing.

Everybody knew that: a lot had been written with regard to the downfall of Principal City long before the enemy won, yet they all were listening to the President respectfully—he was held in high esteem and was not to be blamed for the defeat.

Many of the Members of Parliament even wondered if it was necessary to express their sympathy to him as a sufferer and martyr.

"Principal City has fallen, citizens," the President said. "We do not know the terms of peace yet but they will be horrific. I am calling for calm and patience."

There was something in his words, a certain weightiness that set one's mind at rest.

"We need to issue a proclamation," a Member of Parliament suggested.

"Yes. Yes. Definitely. A proclamation. We need to elect a committee."

The committee was elected, the proclamation drawn up.

"Citizens of Principal City!" it went. "I am calling on you to stay calm. No indiscretion shall be inflicted upon the conquerors. We shall not respond to any offenses. Do not pay regard to our enemies' flowers, advertisements, and music. Be patient. Let Reason, the only ruler of the earth, help you; submit to its rightful authority."

The proclamation did not help. There was firing to be heard in various parts of the city at night, from guns and cannons shooting at the pestilent advertisements that beclouded the sky. A large guerrilla party formed in one of the suburbs, setting off on their own to fight the victorious enemy.

The madmen suffered a terrible fate: they were disarmed, divided, forcefully washed, given new clothes, and made to listen to music, eat luxurious food, and revel in company with beautiful women.

Many took their own lives, many were put into lunatic asylums, while most, disgraced and ridiculed, victims to the temptation, returned to Principal City.

4

On the fifth day of the victory celebrations the enemy sent their truce envoys. They arrived

unarmed and unescorted in an open car and stopped in front of the President's residence. There were three of them: an old man, a woman, and a tall, humorless, squinting man of middle age, the most resolute and business-minded of all, by the look of him.

It turned out, however, that the actual head of the delegation was the woman—of an average height, bony, with a pleasant smile and colorless eyes.

She declared to the President of Principal City that her nation bore no malice to the vanquished and wished neither violence nor revenge, their only demand being consent to build a new city above Principal City, new squares and streets over its squares and streets, new houses and bridges over its houses and bridges.

The President rose from his chair, flung up his arms, and—cried uncontrollably.

The enemy's envoys stepped back from him and turned to the wall. The woman was surprised, shifting her shoulders as if at a loss.

When the President stopped crying, she came up to him and said, with no sympathy, yet without harshness, "I cannot grasp why you are so worried, Mr. President, perhaps you have not understood—not a single resident of the city, not a single building will suffer any harm. We will be constructing a city of our own above and over Principal City. I hope you have heard about our technologies. Of course we are going to cause you some inconvenience: in front of your windows, steel girders will stand—foundations of our houses and streets. But that's a small matter, isn't it? Then, obviously, it will be darker than now down here, it may even happen that some districts will get totally dark—well, you'll have to use electricity. There's no getting around it. My nation's will is sacred, and I am not entitled to change it."

The President of Principal City was silent.

The enemies were terse, adequate, and businesslike. They were not sentimental. Besides, they knew clearly what they wanted, and knew that no power on the earth could prevent them from fulfilling their aspirations.

"Why are you doing this?" the President asked, and sighed loudly. He felt at once that his question had arisen from weariness rather than from political savvy.

"Yes," he said to correct himself. "I was asking for no reason. But could you say what you are going to do in Upper City?"

"We are going to live there," the old man replied in the woman's stead, and coughed scornfully.

"Odd."

"There is nothing odd about it," the woman said.

"What you want is to ruin us," the President said with a sigh. This remark of his was no more successful with the enemy's envoys than the previous ones. "No, gentlemen, you'd better kill me! Do it!" the President exclaimed tragically, making a gesture of despair.

The envoys winced: their country, rich in industrial equipment, was poor in pathos, so the President's pathos was outright disgusting to them.

"Kill me! I can't take such an unheard-of disgrace! To live down here, in the dark below you, to meet you ceaselessly, to mix with you—Oh!"

"I beg your pardon," the woman interrupted, "but the residents of Principal City will not be seeing or meeting us. Except perhaps during the first ten years, until construction down here is finished—and you will not see us after that."

"How come?"

"The residents of Principal City will be strictly forbidden to enter Upper City."

"Kill me! Kill me! I don't want to talk to you! Goddamn a culture if it can be so cruel! Destroy Principal City, turn it into ruins first, and build your new city after that. I am going to arrange an uprising this very day. Go away. I deem any negotiations redundant."

"This is unwise of you," the woman responded coolly. "An uprising is a savage mat-

ter. A pointless one, too. We are very strong. But I should say, your culture is most secure."

"How dare you speak of our culture?" the President cried with the same pathos, which was aplenty in Principal City.

"That's exactly what we are speaking of. We are speaking of the genuine culture. Do you really think we'd have spared you unless we cared about preserving your culture, unless we respected the idea of continuity of cultures? We see your nation as an anachronism but we think highly of your culture, so we are going to build our city above yours only because we want to possess and preserve your buildings, your wonderful museums, your libraries and temples. That's the only reason. We want to have your old, beautiful culture in the cellar, so to speak, and to age it like wine. . . ."

5

The President of Principal City made a request to the conquerors to remove commercial advertisements from the sky, at least for one night, so that the authorities could inform the population of the peace terms and the victors' intention to build a new city above Principal City.

The enemy's headquarters responded that there was no real need to use the sky for that purpose—it could be done by way of printed appeals—but if it *was* the sky that the President wished to employ, it was still possible to negotiate with advertisers who had taken the sky on lease and to compensate them for the incurred losses.

While this issue was being discussed in Parliament, a compromising centrist movement revealed itself for the first time. One of the speakers for the moderate groups made an extensive speech seeking to prove that from their perspective—that of the victors—the enemy was right and could not act other than they did. Because of this, taking the path of endless bickering and obviously futile struggle was unwise. It was necessary—without delay, if possible—to work out the general terms of the agreement, and to take up struggle when conditions became favorable.

This speaker's speech caused a great outrage. He was even accused of venality and betraying Principal City, and three members of extreme groups had to be ushered out of the assembly hall by force.

"Haven't you by chance won a contract to build a few streets in Upper City?" one of the three shouted, delirious, to the hapless speaker.

With regard to that last reproach, the President of Principal City—haggard looking, having not slept at all in a few days—informed the assembly that the enemy had no intention of offering any contracts to residents of Principal City, which was already known from the Statute of Construction of Upper City, so the reproach by members of extreme groups had not only been undeservedly insulting but also entirely groundless.

After that the President suggested forgoing fruitless debate and electing a committee to negotiate with the leaseholders of the sky so as to clear it of advertisements for one night.

The committee was elected.

By evening the matter was settled: the government had a half of the heavenly dome to notify the public of momentous news.

It was the President in his own person who wrote the announcement. Endorsed by Parliament, in the night it bloomed in straight, stern, and sinister red letters on the blue, mysteriously indifferent dome of the sky.

"Citizens," it went, "take courage! It is for the last time that you are looking at the free sky, your sky. From now on it belongs to someone else. The stars will twinkle for others, the sun will shine for others. Our great, glorious, and lovable Principal City is to turn into a huge, dark, pallidly electrical vault. A new city is to be built above it, and it will be strictly forbidden for us to enter it. Construction of Upper City is going to take ten years, and there will

be less of the free sky above us with each passing day. This is, dear citizens, the conquerors' dreadful decision. Be patient! Take courage! Let reason help you, reason and the only wisdom on earth—the wisdom of hope. It is impossible for Principal City to perish so terribly and irrevocably.

"This is blind fate testing us. Let hope, good spirits, and belief in the fortunate change of circumstances help you."

This was followed by the dry articles of the peace treaty.

6

That night was unmatched in anxiety. Even before the President's announcement was published, rumors had begun to spread throughout Principal City that some enormous metallic tubes had been erected by the enemy ten versts* from the city and aimed at it.

There were anxious speculations in evening newspapers that those constructions were meant for washing the President's announcement off, should the conquerors find its wording disagreeable—machines that generated artificial rain or darkened the sky.

Yet special midnight editions of newspapers disproved that assumption: it turned out that the machines and tubes had been installed by the enemy's Efficient Philosophy Association with a view to producing omni-audible machine-generated systematic laughter to mock failures and wrong actions of the government, political parties, and people of Principal City.

The newspaper that was first to reveal the true purpose of the machines and tubes supplied the article with a word of advice—to close the doors and windows tight and, if possible, to stay indoors so as not to hear that hurtful but—alas!—inescapable laughter.

Yellow sheets of paper were coming in two or three issues per hour. There had been enough time to reprint this item and furnish it with belligerent comments and threats saying that the residents of Principal City would not take such abuse, that it was necessary to urgently deploy all drums in Principal City, all bells small and large, all hooters and other instruments capable of making great noise, and if those would not be enough, not to stop short of a cannonade.

At two past midnight, the first peals of the terrible machine laughter came.

The unparalleled oppression of its sounds made the hearts of all living beings inhabiting Principal City leap and shrink.

The machine laughter had two effects, amusing and depressing at once.

No one slept that night.

Teenagers, grown-ups, women, and old people alike wandered about the streets, laughing wildly. Many of them were sobbing. Still many more, surrendering to the infectiousness of machine sounds, roared and wept at the same time.

There were some attempts to counteract the action of those truly infernal machines, too. Somewhere, there was the beating of drums, screaming, explosions somewhere, and there was incessant shooting, but soon it became evident that if the laughter endured, the ramifications would be disastrous.

A delegation from academics, humanitarian societies, and universities approached the President of Principal City, making a request to enter into negotiations with the Efficient Philosophy Association without delay and exercise their best efforts to stop that demoralizing, inhumane, unknown laughter.

The delegation submitted several reports to the President that dealt with the immediate effects caused by that monstrous torture in only three hours. Even fragmentary accounts showed that in Principal City, five million strong, there were dozens of mental disorders, about eighty suicides, and a vast, incalculable number of grave nervous shocks.

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* A verst (more precisely, versta) is an old Russian measure of length equal to 1.0668 kilometers or 0.6629 miles (3,500 feet).

The President of Principal City received the delegation while sitting by the open window. Perfectly calm, he reclined there gazing wearily at the vague outlines of the houses and roofs. Even the harshest peals of roaring laughter, which bore a distinct resemblance to that of a healthy, deep-chested, clever, and revengeful man, failed to make the President wince.

Still calm, he listened to the agitated delegates and, complying humbly with their request, gave the required written orders.

7

Two people set out in a government-owned airplane to meet the chairman of the Efficient Philosophy Association: the internationally acclaimed writer Claude, whose humanitarian ideas left the whole cultural world awestruck, and the scientist Glavatsky, whose genius and tireless work of forty years made it possible to deliver humankind from the plague of consumption.

There was no doubt that these two men would make a proper impact on the academics of the winning country and bring an end to the oppressing form of philosophical sermon.

The delegates got an honorable welcome, as could be expected. In as few as thirty minutes they were received by the governing board of the association, and their appeal was given full attention.

However, the appeal was dismissed.

The chairman of the Efficient Philosophy Association, a little wizened old man in round spectacles, while bending respectfully and folding his arms on his stomach, stated to the renowned delegates of Principal City:

"I would be happy if I could humor you. But, I regret to say, we find it impossible to waste such a good chance to battle with the outdated, fruitless, and, in our view, detrimental epidemic of optimism which Principal City had been stricken by and, as you see, fallen victim to. Of course it is deplorable to hear about the shocks and diseases you describe in your reports, but we strongly believe there will be considerably more morally reborn, invigorated, and even spiritually resurrected persons in Principal City eventually. We feel compelled to carry on our sermon of laughter for nine more hours. It is not incurious to note that the Syndicate of Satirical Clubs and Magazines had tried to obtain a license for laughter from His Royal Majesty before we did, but we succeeded in proving, just in time, that our form of sermon was the only one of a scientific and complete nature, so the Academy of Sciences granted the monopoly to us. The syndicate had intended to alternate wholesome scientific laughter with whistling, a rather dubious measure, as well as with some ironic howls and catcalls, the reasonability of which cries for, I should say so, severe testing and can hardly be recognized as satisfactory from a scientific point of view."

8

Two weeks had passed since that memorable night.

Little had outwardly changed in Principal City, aside from a somewhat increased rate of fires. However, a great many public officials and private citizens considered the arson attacks on libraries and archives as a worldwide crisis.

The conquerors barely showed themselves. They were furthering and consolidating their victory by way of official negotiations and issuing decrees and statutes.

Actions of individual guerrilla parties had ceased. The conquerors, for their part, stopped showering Principal City with flowers, and there had not been any music to be heard for a long time. That left only glowing advertisements that consumed the sky by night, but residents of Principal City had become accustomed to them with time.

The shops were open. City traffic was resumed to the full extent. Newspapers and magazines got out on schedule.

The incipient exodus of wealthy citizens from Principal City was checked by the enemy's prohibitive decree, but even that failed to dishearten the community in any real way.

As a matter of fact, the spirit of apathy and indifference was taking hold of more and more people day by day. Automatic cinematographic machines, installed on many streets of Principal City and filming passersby continuously for further examination by the Society of Love for People, now captured a large percentage of figures displaying a languorous gait, vacant and depressed expressions, and facial tics. In a sign of mourning and protest the members of the society began wearing black bands on their left arms.

Suicides became a frequent thing. Newspapers published self-murderers' suicide notes, confessions, and aphorisms in advertisement sections. A respectable old pigeon fancier poisoned all his pigeons—more than ten thousand birds—with cocaine, painted them black, and let them go into the city. He poisoned himself later in the day, while the poor creatures rushed about the city in a daze for a few more hours until they dropped dead on roofs and pavements, cooing plaintively.

Morals were visibly degenerating. Circulation of newspapers specializing in confessions had soared. A great success, humor sheets throve and multiplied, making vicious and vulgar mockery of everything that had been dear to Principal City just yesterday, everything that everyone had believed in and worshipped.

Party leaders, heads of social movements, and groups engaged in settling personal scores were harassing each other. Bitter confusion and spiritual devastation were universal now. Even serious-minded and governmental newspapers started dedicating a lot of space to personal polemics that were not free of spiteful accusations, vindictive attacks, and intent to offend and humiliate rather than to establish the truth.

Narcotic clubs, games of chance, lechery, and consumption of wine and sweetmeats spread most extensively, and, finally, murders and scams escalated in frequency. The most typical example of the latter was the trial of a lawyer who had joined as a conquerors' agent and sold to the residents of Principal City, in secrecy and at a sky-high price, counterfeit permits granting a right to reside in the yet-to-be-built Upper City.

All theaters were open and overflowing with indifferent spectators in search of oblivion. Concerts and balls became much more common than before. There was no merriment about them, though.

The Society of Love for People arranged splendid pageants to fight despondency. On huge motor vehicles adorned by flowers and gaudy decorations, clowns played antics, singers sang, and acrobats showed tricks.

By a special conquerors' decree the government of Principal City was dismissed and its parliament dissolved.

In place of those, the conquerors suggested that Principal City should elect the Government of Obedience, made up of six members.

1. The Minister of Quiet, whose task was reducing noise in Principal City to a minimum so that it would not disturb inhabitants of the soon-to-be Upper City.
2. The Minister of Politeness, who was responsible for protecting the workers and supervisors who were constructing Upper City from propaganda and exploitation of pity, as well as from insults, sneers, and various annoyances.
3. The Minister of Responsibility. This office ensured the reliability of the residents of Principal City and guar-

anteed, by way of establishing a strictly scientific system, the absolute physical and psychological impossibility of any attacks on the well-being and tranquillity of Upper City coming from below.

4. The Minister of Quantity, whose duty was to limit and, if need be, to reduce population growth so that overcrowdedness of Principal City would not affect the well-being of Upper City in any way.
5. The Minister of Illusions, in charge of creating an illusion of the sky by means of grand scenery, wherever it would be possible.
6. The Minister of Hopes. This last one was to inspire the residents of Principal City in the spirit of wise hope for circumstances to change for the better in the future.

The decree terminated with two notes.

The first one stated that the Party of the Obedient that had emerged in the city had approached the conquerors with a proposal to rename Principal City as Dark City. In this regard His Royal Majesty deigned to respond that such renaming would be premature but he asked to express gratitude to the right-minded part of the public that had displayed such a remarkable act of wise resignation.

The other note gave Principal City permission to satisfy the natural need of indignation during the space of five days. For that period, the conquerors would withdraw all troops from the vicinity of Principal City so that nothing prevented its residents from showing their emotions freely. What is more, the government, army, and people of the winning country would declare themselves—for all the five days meant for indignation—supremely tolerable to anything that would be spoken of them, no matter in what form.

The sixth and seventh days would be dedicated to the election of the Government of Obedience, and by the noon of the eighth day everything should have been carried out to the letter and the government formed, or else Principal City would be wiped off ruthlessly from the face of the earth in a few hours.

Before long, upon the conquerors' request, there began vigorous work to radically disinfect Principal City, which had to be perfectly neat and wholesome as a future foundation for Upper City.

The residents of Principal City were inoculated against all diseases. On the insistence of the authorities, the Bureau of Food made it obligatory for everyone to take bromide daily. Without a pharmacy receipt and evidence that the due dose had been taken, even essential foods were not to be handed out.

Principal City was a singular sight now: people of all classes, standings, and positions, one and all, were cleanly and tidily dressed, well combed and well bathed, their homes a model of cleanliness and order.

There was only a marginal need for repressions.

The Government of Obedience demonstrated maximum energy.

Under the Ministry of Politeness, cadres of supervisors, agents, and policemen were formed. They performed their duties diligently, guarding workers who were already erecting steel and concrete supports for Upper City.

Principal City lived a restless, hurried life of labor now. There was the unceasing clatter of clanging iron and steel, banging hammers, groaning cutters, metallic gritting of winches, and hooting of construction motorcars.

On most streets, there were people digging pits, taking measurements, putting up scaffolding, and in some areas the roofs of buildings were as crowded as squares or streets.

11

A lot of time had passed.

Upper City was growing by leaps and bounds. The western part was almost finished, and people settled there. Litter was taken away daily by cargo airplanes. There was smoke curling from chimneys. By this time, crematoriums had started incinerating the dead. Children went to schools. There were barracks and prisons. There was a lunatic asylum. In the middle of a broad square positioned right above the magnificent park of Principal City the royal palace soared up, beautiful and stylish.

It had become almost totally dark in Principal City. Flats in unaffected houses were rented out at high prices, but soon enough those houses were built over too.

At one time both society and the press talked a great deal about a clever backdrop painted by a certain artist, a believable substitute of the sky for two whole streets and a square. The Ministry of Illusions awarded that artist a medal.

It was strictly prohibited for the residents of Lower City to enter Upper City. This was one of the fundamental articles of the law: those who broke it were put in special Prisons for the Curious, known for their severe regime.

The ministers of the Government of Obedience had changed several times during that period.

There had been a few uprisings in Principal City, all of them brutally suppressed. In two cases small riotous areas were surrounded by a steel vise of vehicles and troops and then mercilessly cemented.

The huge resulting cubes of cement, graves to so many lives, came to be known as the Cubes of Immature Dreams.

Both times, after the rebels had been defeated, the Efficient Philosophy Association fought ideas of optimism with the sermon of machine laughter.

By contrast, during the periods of obedience and reaction the association announced to residents of the darkened Principal City through deafening bellows of giant phonographs:

"We love you!!! We love you!"

"Man loves obedience in his neighbors!"

"The meaning of life lies in suffering and self-improvement!"

And once the machines of the association bellowed deafeningly all day long,

"Know thyself! Know thyself!!!"

The only minister of the government who had never left his post was the Minister of Hopes. He was old and jolly.

"Citizens!" he preached every Sunday. "Dear citizens! Hope! There will come a time when adverse circumstances change! We shall see the sun and sky again! Have faith! Above all, have faith and hope!"

Before long, Upper City took its full shape. It was a large, lively, busy, and important city. There were also a lot of social movements, a lot of social contests between parties. There were parties of equality and justice, too, as there were champions who struggled for liberation of Lower City. They made passionate speeches. They had print media and clubs of their own.

Down below in Principal City, there also were dreamers, champions of justice and equality.

By and large, though, both groups lived a life of restlessness and peace at the same time, often tormented and rarely joyous, but always or nearly always full of hope—just the way people live in the world.

12

The horror came without warning. On a sultry summer noon a factory blew up on the outskirts of Principal City. The risk of fire in the city had been factored in, and usually was quenched in a few minutes.

But it was otherwise this time.

The firefighters were met with gunshots. The workers injured by the explosion were shooting. Those remaining unharmed joined

them. Hundreds of bullets burst from the burning building in every direction.

The spirit of rebellion swept through Principal City. Weapons, bombs, explosion devices, and explosives seemed to come out of thin air.

There were people rushing about the streets and screaming frantically:

"Arm yourself! Arm yourself! To arms!"

Alarm bells and hoots roared on every street.

Utmost apprehension seized the city. The fire enveloped a few houses, its area expanding steadily. The entire district was wrapped in black pungent smoke. It crept along the streets, finding no other outlets. Many suffocated in the smoke.

Anguished cries and moans were coming from everywhere, drowned out by the sound of more and more explosions.

Who set fire to the houses? Who blew up the bridges?

There was no telling. Dark human figures dashed about in the flames like devils, running into sight and then disappearing again.

Lots of people were racing along the streets with screams of joy. Many cried with joy. Someone, shouting breathlessly, was commanding,

"Blow up bridges! Blow up houses! Burn! Burn as much as you can!"

A thunderous explosion rocked both cities. Screams were heard from many a hundred thousand voices. A sound came from someone blasting the park dominated by the royal palace. The white edifice went askew and collapsed. What a sound there was as the park trees began to break! How the iron lattices of bridges and fences bent and crumpled! Colossal pillars of fire and rocks alternated with each other.

The electricity went out in Principal City. The darkness and the riot turned it into a black seething chaos. The commotion spread over to Upper City as well.

Many a hundred thousand bullets and shells spattered down from above. Every crack was used to shoot into the darkness, every breach. But new explosions threw houses and streets up in the air along with shooters.

Flames, choking smoke, clouds of dust, glass, molten metal, and human bodies, thousands of bodies, all were eddying in a whirling mad pandemonium.

On a square, by the light of torches, to crackling of gunfire and the rumble of cave-ins, the Minister of Hopes made a plea to the crowd:

"Citizens! Poor, distraught citizens! Stop! Stop before it's too late! There's only death ahead of you! Was it *this* that I've been teaching you for so many years?! What have you traded the spirit of wise hope for?! For a blind, benighted riot?! Stop! Stop, you wretched folk! Take pity on yourself and our glorious Principal City! Stop before it's too late!"

Poor fellow! He was stoned to death, and his ministry was blasted just like any building in Upper City.

The Efficient Philosophy Association tried to preach something by means of their machines but those were hurled back by a pillar of fire. The chairman, totally old and decrepit now, barely had time to escape on a single-seat airplane.

"Fools," he shouted, wallowing all by himself in the cloudless blue sky. "You can never win! The backbone of the world is reasonable violence, not a wild self-confident riot! Blind rebellious worms! Despicable optimistic calves! What are you hoping for?!"

He was suffocating in the open air like in a noose; he spat downwards, where houses were collapsing and fire roiling, and he died of fear, spite, and grief. The machine carried his underweight, wrinkled corpse about for a long time.

Thousands of other airplanes took off from Upper City, a means of escape for children and women. Screams and sobs filled the air.

And down below, there were more and more cave-ins and explosions rumbling. Bright sunshine found its way into Principal City now. The sky was visible on many streets.

"Long live the sun!" thousands of smoke-

poisoned people yelled in a gleeful frenzy. "Long live the sky! Hooraaay . . ."

In reply, shells were showering down, hot cement was raining from above with a sepulchral hiss, and the stifling, all-corroding, deadly powder was falling.

People died like flies but those alive retaliated with more deafening explosions, arson, and the accurate fire of the doomed.

There was fighting on every street. People battled in flats, upon roofs, beneath ruins, and out in the open.

"Blow up bridges!" shouts were coming from all sides. "Blast Upper City! Burn! Blast and burn as much as possible!"

"Citizens! Citizens! Flee from the market district! Call everyone! The railway station of Upper City's about to collapse! Run for your lives, citizens!"

"Hoorraaay! Hoorraaaay!"

After a little while, the railway station did collapse. The terrible crash could not drown out people's delighted screams. Long chains of cars were falling with a thunderous rattle, side by side with pieces of buildings, with bridges, platforms, and rails.

A fiery vortex, a whirlwind of flame, iron, and rocks, shot up into the sky.

"Hoorraaay!"

Large groups of rebels climbed up the ruins into Upper City. It was half empty. The residents were evacuating by the thousands in airplanes. Curses, fire, and bullets were sent after them. The troops had dispersed. All barracks had been blasted. Fire was raging in every quarter; buildings shook and tumbled down.

"Enough!" shouts were coming from below. "Enough! We are dying! Stop! Enough!"

Whole streets of those buried alive, fighting their way painfully through the ruins, begged for mercy.

But new cave-ins buried them again, killed them, wiped them out.

The great destruction went on all day and night, and in the morning tired explosions capped the doom of Principal City.

In such a manner, simple and spontaneous, it perished. Ways of oppression are intricate and varied—in this regard, there is no limit to human imagination—while the road to freedom is simple but bitter. Upper City was gone.

There was only a sea of smoldering and burning ruins, monstrous piles of palaces, squares, bridges, and streets, and amid that twisted chaos of iron, stone, and wood—occasional crowds of blackened, ragged, and bloodied people.

Many of them were wounded, many dying; many were dancing, bereft of their sanity; but the wounded and the dying and the mad alike were singing, joyously and loudly, songs in honor of the rising and dazzlingly indifferent sun.